

09 March 2023, Thursday



**DENR**

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CASH-FOR-WORK IN CLEANUP; ANTIQUE FOLK MAKE OWN SPILL BOOM

# DENR, DOH START REGULAR WATER, AIR QUALITY

## TESTS IN AREAS HIT BY OIL SPILL

By the Inquirer Staff  
@InqNational

**CITY OF CALAPAN**—The environment and health departments have started testing groundwater, seawater and air quality in areas affected by oil spill from a sunken fuel tanker in Oriental Mindoro province to check for toxins and chemicals which might pose risk to public health.

Gov. Humerlito Dolor, in a statement posted on his Facebook page Tuesday, said the initial result of air quality testing by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on March 5 “passed standards.”

Dolor said Environment Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, during her visit to Oriental Mindoro on Tuesday, guaranteed

seawater and air testing in 38 sampling areas in the province every three days to ensure that any change would be detected.

Personnel from the Department of Health (DOH) also collected samples of groundwater for testing on Wednesday to see if the spill had contaminated drinking water in coastal communities. Results have yet to be released.

### Gov't assistance

On Feb. 28, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) reported an oil spill from MT Princess Empress which capsized off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. Reports said it was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil as cargo.

The accident resulted in the spillage of thick industrial oil, posing health hazards to affect-

ed residents and disrupting the livelihood of fishermen as well as owners of resorts and other business establishments.

The PCG reported Wednesday that their personnel collected 92 sacks of oil-coated debris, seagrasses and used oil absorbent pads during the coastal cleanup at Barangay Buhay na Tubig in Pola town on Tuesday.

On Monday, the Oriental Mindoro provincial board passed a resolution declaring a state of calamity in 76 coastal villages across nine towns affected by the spill.

President Marcos on Wednesday said he instructed government agencies to start the cleanup, assuring affected communities that the government would extend assistance particularly through its cash-

for-work program.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the launching of the Kadiwa outlet for workers in Quezon City, the President said displaced fishermen would be given temporary jobs and would be tapped to help in the cleanup.

Private companies which have the equipment, as well as the government of Japan, have sent assistance to the government's efforts to contain the oil spill, Mr. Marcos said.

### 'Bayanihan'

In Antique province, local officials, volunteers and residents of 18 villages in Caluya town started making improvised spill booms to contain the spill. These were sent to the affected areas in Barangays

Sibolo, Semirara and Tinogboc, according to the PCG.

These booms were made of used clothes, coconut husks, fish nets and other indigenous materials, said Commander Jansen Benjamin, public information officer of the PCG Western Visayas District.

Caluya, composed of five islands, has been declared under a state of calamity after about 8 kilometers of its shoreline were hit by the spill.

In her Facebook page, village chief Catherine Lim said the “bayanihan” (cooperation) spirit continued as many organizations and individuals in Semirara had been donating plastic bottles, ecobags and other materials in producing the spill booms.

She said the village would need more jute sacks to collect contaminated seagrass, sand and debris.

Meanwhile, the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) has set aside P315 million as an emergency loan fund for its members who live or work in Oriental Mindoro, where a state of calamity had been declared due to the oil spill.

“With our emergency loan program, we hope to alleviate the plight of nearly 13,000 GSIS members who are working or residing in the affected areas and pensioners who reside there,” GSIS president and general manager Wick Veloso said in a statement.

—REPORTS FROM MADONNA T. VIROLA, CONNIE FERNANDEZ-BROJAN, JEROME ANING AND RONNEL W. DOMINGO INQ





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# BBM: Gov't to speed up oil spill cleanup

By HELEN FLORES

The government aims to finish the oil spill cleanup in Oriental Mindoro in less than four months, President Marcos said yesterday.

"During the Guimaras oil spill, it took four months before the cleanup was completed. Maybe this time, because the oil spill is a little less, we can speed it up. Even if not in a month, maybe we won't last four months," Marcos said in an interview after attending a Kadiwa ng Pangulo event in Quezon City.

The President was referring to the oil tanker *M/T Solar I*, which was carrying more than two million liters of bunker fuel when it sank off the coast of Guimaras in 2006.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) had earlier said the oil spill cleanup would likely take more than a month, citing the lack of manpower and equipment.

The *Empress* was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank near Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28.

Marcos said private companies are providing equipment to help contain the oil spill and prevent it from reaching fishing sanctuaries and tourist areas.

He said he instructed the Department of

Labor and Employment and Department of Social Welfare and Development to continue providing assistance to affected individuals through the cash for work program.

## 11,000 fishermen affected

Up to 11,000 fishermen have been affected by the oil spill, according to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

In a radio interview, BFAR spokesperson Nazario Briguera said the oil spill may result in the decline in fisheries production in Mimaropa.

"Thousands of hectares of seaweed were affected and the oil slick will also affect the fisheries production, particularly the marine municipal fisheries in Mimaropa," he added.

Briguera warned the public of a possible shortage in the supply of round scad or *galunggong* if the oil spill reaches Palawan.

He said BFAR released an initial P4 million to provide assistance to affected fishermen.

Briguera said a fishing ban is being implemented in Pinamalayan, Gloria, Bansud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay and Bulalacao following the oil spill.

## Oil spill boom

The PCG said installation of an oil spill boom in the area where the motor tanker

was believed to have sunk started yesterday.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources said the *BRP Hydrographer Ventura* detected the site of the sunken vessel 1,200 feet or around 400 meters below sea level northeast of Pola town in Oriental Mindoro.

Oil spill response teams were deployed even as residents and volunteers in Sitio Sabang, Barangay Tinogboc in Caluya, Antique helped in the coastal cleanup and collected "oiled debris" in the affected shorelines.

The PCG said its personnel collected around 92 sacks of oiled debris, sea grasses and used oil absorbent pads during the cleanup drive in Sitio, Bagong Silang in Barangay Buhay na Tubig in Pola.

Meanwhile, the Department of Health convened the Inter-agency Committee on Environment and Health to discuss measures to prevent a possible outbreak of diseases due to the oil spill.

DOH officer-in-charge Maria Rosario Vergeire said panel members discussed key areas concerning the oil spill and updates on the reported cases of diarrhea in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental.

- With Robertzon Ramirez, Mayen Jaymalin





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THE PHILIPPINE STAR  
**nation**

EDITOR: TERESA B. COROS

THURSDAY, 1 MARCH 9, 2023

Philippine Coast Guard personnel conduct coastal cleanup on Tuesday in Sitio Bagong Silang, Barangay Buhay na Tubig in Pola, Oriental Mindoro, which was affected by an oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress. Photo courtesy of the PCG.







## Palace to expedite oil spill cleanup in Mindoro

By RAYMUND ANTONIO

President Marcos has high hopes the ongoing clean-up drive for the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro will not take longer than usual, noting its negative impact on the livelihood of fisherfolk there.

The chief executive stressed this as he recalled the 2006 oil spill in Guimaras, which required massive cleanup for four months. ▶ 6

"Hopefully, kung hindi kaya ng one month, hopefully less [than four months]. Kasi 'yung Guimaras na oil spill apat na buwan bago na-cleanup (Hopefully, if the cleanup can't be done in one month, we can finish it in less than four months. The Guimaras oil spill cleanup took four months to finish)," he told reporters.

Marcos vowed the government will expedite the cleanup, citing less volume of oil spill in the waters of Mindoro.

"Siguro naman this time kasi mas bawas nang kaunti ang oil spill ay mas mabibilisan natin. Kahit na hindi sa isang buwan, hindi naman siguro natin paabutin ng apat na buwan (Maybe this time, we can do it faster since the oil spill is lesser. Even if it's not possible in a month, maybe we will not let it reach four months)," he added.

Motor tanker Princess Empress was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank in the waters off Balingawan Point in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28 due to strong waves.

The sinking of the vessel led to the oil spill, affecting some tourist spots as well as fishing sanctuaries and maritime resources, such as coral reefs, mangroves, and

seagrass.

Marcos said he directed the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to provide aid through a "cash-for-work" program to help them recover from the incident.

"Yung mga mangangisda hindi makapangisda ngayon, bawal mangisda. At kaya't wala silang hanapbuhay, pinalitan natin ng cash-for-work program dahil sila ngayon ang maglilinis. (Fishermen can't fish now that's why they have no livelihood. We are offering them a cash-for-work program since they will help in the cleanup)," he said. "Pag natapos na 'yun, pwede na silang mangisda ulit, pwede silang bumalik sa trabaho nila (Once the cleanup is completed, they can go back to fishing, they can go back to their work)."

The chief executive said the government is closely monitoring the situation to check if the oil spill will spread further to fishing sanctuaries and tourist areas.

Marcos said private corporations and even the Japanese government have provided assistance and equipment to help with the cleanup.





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## Marcos wants oil spill cleaned in 4 months

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR  
and VICTOR REYES

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. yesterday said he wants the oil spill clean-up in Oriental Mindoro to be completed in about four months and directed different government agencies to ensure continued assistance to the affected communities, including the provision of cash-for-work program.

In a chance interview, the President said the clean-up during the Guimaras oil spill in 2006 took about four months and wants the Mindoro oil spill done faster since it has already started.

"The clean-up for the Guimaras oil spill was four months. Hopefully, by this time since the oil spill has already been lessened, we can speed it up. It does not have to be next month, but if not next month, it should not reach four months," he said.

Seventy-seven coastal barangays of nine Oriental Mindoro towns

affected by the massive oil spill caused by the sinking of an oil tanker off Naujan town last February 28 have been placed under a state of calamity.

The MT Princess Empress was on its way to Iloilo from Bataan last February 28 when it encountered engine trouble due to overheating and sank, according to the Philippine Coast Guard. The vessel was transporting about 800,000 liters of industrial oil fuel and 10,000 liters of operational oil when it figured in the mishap.

The sinking of the tanker resulted in the spillage of thick industrial oil, posing health hazards to residents and disrupting the livelihood of fishermen as well as owners of resorts and other business establishments.

The President said he also instructed the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Department Social welfare and

See MARCOS > Page B2

### MARCOS

Development (DSWD) to oversee the clean-up and assist the fishermen who are unable to fish due to the oil spill.

He said fishermen can do the cash-for-work program through the cleanup while they are waiting for the time when they can fish again.

Marcos said the government has doubled its effort in controlling the oil spill from further spreading.

He said that because the MT Princess Empress has been found, it would be easier to find the source of the leak and take appropriate action.

#### SEVERELY AFFECTED

The mayor of Pola, Oriental Mindoro, Jennifer Cruz, said the oil spill clean-up may take six months to one year, noting the town was severely affected because the MT Princess Empress was located off the area.

"This may take time. According to experts who came here yesterday, it may take six (months) to one year to clear the oil spill. That's just their estimate but they don't really know how long this will take," said Cruz.

"The cleanup at the shoreline alone may take six months to one year... There's so much oil spilt here (in Pola)," Cruz said, adding that 11 coastal barangays of the town were affected by the oil spill, caus-

ing illness to at least 23 residents as of last Monday.

She said residents living near the shoreline have been advised to evacuate. Cruz could not immediately say how many residents have so far evacuated.

Cruz appealed for help for fishermen and their families, noting they have been told not to venture into the sea.

"Fisherfolks need help, they have no other source of livelihood," she said. "We're severely affected by the oil spill; the vessel was located in the town of Pola."

The oil spill has affected eight other towns in Oriental Mindoro and Caluya town in Antique.

Marinduque Gov. Presbitero Velasco and Aklan Gov. Jose Enrique Miraflores said they are preparing for the possibility of the oil spill reaching their provinces.

As of yesterday, Velasco said there were no indications the oil spill has reached Marinduque, which he said is just 47 nautical miles away from Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

"So far, we have not seen manifestations of oil spill (in Marinduque). There are no reports of the oil going towards us but we are in close coordination (with authorities)," said Velasco.

Miraflores said they have also made preparations to contain possible oil spill reaching in the province, which is near Antique.

"We are prepared in the province, especially in Boracay, because

Boracay is near the location of the oil spill (in Antique)," said Miraflores.

"We are preparing, especially the LGU (local government unit) Malay (where Boracay Island is located)," he added.

Miraflores said the province is closely coordinating with the PCG, which has provided them with oil spill booms for deployment in the event the oil spill reaches Aklan.

#### EMERGENCY LOAN

The Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) yesterday announced that it has earmarked P315 million in emergency loans for members and pensioners affected by the oil spill.

"The oil spill has affected more than half of Oriental Mindoro. With our emergency loan program, we hope to alleviate the plight of nearly 13,000 GSIS members who are working or residing in the affected areas and pensioners who reside there." GSIS President and General manager Wick Veloso said in a statement.

Veloso said the GSIS has allocated a total budget of P6.2 billion for its emergency loan program for the year.

Upon receipt of the required documents from the provincial government of Oriental Mindoro, GSIS said it will open the emergency loan to 11,024 active members and 1,896 old-age and disability pensioners.

"We are closely monitoring the situation for developments. Should the Oriental Mindoro oil spill further spread and affect other towns and provinces, we assure members and pensioners in said areas that GSIS is ready to open the emergency loan program once a state of calamity declaration has been done and required documents have been submitted to GSIS," Veloso said.

Qualified to apply for loans are members in active service and not on leave of absence without pay; have at least three months of paid premiums within the last six months prior to application; have no pending administrative or criminal case; have no due and demandable loan; and have a net take-home pay of not lower than P5,000 after all required monthly obligations have been deducted.

Old-age and disability pensioners are also qualified to apply if their resulting net monthly take-home pension after loan availment is at least 25 percent of their basic monthly pension.

Members with emergency loan balance may borrow up to P40,000 to pay off their previous emergency loan balance and still receive a maximum net amount of P20,000. Pensioners and those without existing emergency loan may apply for a P20,000 loan.

The loan is payable in three years or 36 equal monthly installments at an interest rate of six percent per annum. - With Angela Celis





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## PBBM vows speedy cleanup of oil spill, aid to communities

BY JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

[@joveemarie](#)

**P**RESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has instructed government agencies to carry out cleanup operations in connection with the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro, and assured affected communities that the government will extend assistance, particularly through the cash-for-work program.

During a media interview on the sidelines of the Kadiwa ng Pangulo launch in Quezon City on Wednesday, the President said authorities have located the sunken tanker that has been leaking industrial fuel oil, enabling them to predict the direction of the spill.

"My instruction to DOLE [Department of Labor and Employment] and DSWD [Department of Social Welfare and Development] is to clean up. Because the fishermen cannot fish now, and therefore they have no job. We replaced it with a cash-for-work program because they will help to carry out cleanup operations," Marcos said.

"But in the meantime, they are engaged in the cash-for-work program in the cleanup. When that's over, they can go fishing again. They can return to their jobs," the President added.

According to Marcos, the government is monitoring fishing sanctuaries and tourist areas, and will immediately carry out a cleanup drive if they detect any presence of oil along the shoreline.

"And we are keeping an eye on private corporations that have equipment, Japan has sent aid to prevent oil from reaching the shoreline," the President said.

Marcos said he hopes that through the current efforts, the oil spill could be contained so that the conditions in the affected communities would normalize soon.

It was reported that eight more towns in the province of Oriental Mindoro were placed under a state of calamity early this week to help authorities extend aid to communities affected by the oil spill.





## PBBM looks at faster cleanup of oil spill, Japan sends expert help

By Vince Lopez, Vito Barcelo, Charles Dantes, Maricel Cruz and Macon Ramos-Araneta

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Wednesday said the government is

looking to clean up the oil spill from a sunken tanker in Oriental Mindoro waters in less than four months.

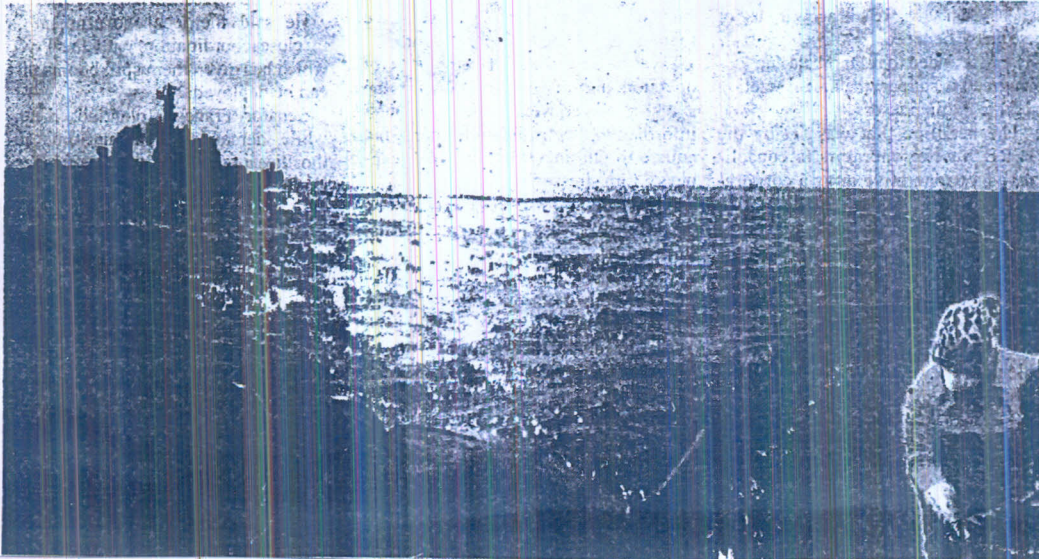
Japan has also committed to send experts to help stop the further spread of oil from the sunken tanker MT Princess

Empress, President Marcos said.

"This is a big help so that we can contain the oil and prevent it from reaching land. The oil reached some coastal areas before we found the vessel," he said. The target is based on how the gov-

ernment cleaned up the 2006 Guimaras oil spill in four months, Mr. Marcos said in an interview on the sidelines of an event in Quezon City.

"If it's not possible in one month, **Next page**



**CONTAINMENT MEASURES** Coast Guard personnel deploy an oil spill boom off Naujan in Oriental Mindoro to contain the leaking industrial fuel from a sunken tanker. Inset photo shows Coast Guard personnel and volunteers collecting debris covered in oil in neighboring municipality Pola.



### PBBM...

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hopefully it will be less than the four months it took to clean up the Guimaras oil spill. If we can't do it in a month, perhaps it will not take four months," he said.

In 2006, some 2 million liters of bunker fuel from sunken Motor tanker Solar I off the coast of Guimaras island created widespread devastation to marine and ecological life in the Panay Gulf and it took the government years to completely address the damage.

The Oriental Mindoro oil spill, which happened in late February, involved a tanker carrying some 800,000 liters of industrial fuel. Spillage from the vessel has affected 10 municipalities in Oriental

Mindoro and could possibly reach other coastal islands including Palawan, Antique and Romblon.

Fishers who were temporarily banned from sailing into affected waters were tapped to help the government in cleanup efforts, Marcos said.

"Fishermen cannot sail off the affected waters so they have no livelihood. We tapped them to clean up under the cash for work program. We will create a cleanup program for all areas, especially fishing sanctuaries and tourist areas, so that residents can get work," he said.

The Philippine Coast Guard has installed an oil spill boom around the suspected wreckage of the sunken MT Princess Empire tanker to contain the oil spill.

The PCG posted a video of its team installing the boom in the waters off Naujan in its official Facebook page.

Pola town Mayor Jennifer Cruz, meanwhile, estimated that it would take six months to a year to clean up the oil spill in her area.

As of Wednesday afternoon, Naujan, Gloria, Pinamalayan, Pola, Bansud, Roxas, Mansalay, Bongabong, and Bulalacao have officially declared a state of calamity due to the oil spill.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources said it has pinpointed the possible spot where the sunken tanker is located.

"That site is about 1,200 feet approximately 400 meters below sea level. It is located about Northeast of Pola, Oriental Mindoro but it is believed to have moved southeast from its last known position where it completely submerged," it said.

The local government of Malay town in Aklan—home to the popular tourist island of Boracay—is already preparing for the possibility of the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro will reach its shores, Gov. Jose Enrique Miraflores.

He said the local government is in close coordination with the PCG, which has given them spill booms that can be deployed.

Senator Francis Tolentino, meanwhile, demanded from maritime authorities a report on the seaworthiness of the four ships that figured in accidents since February.

On Feb. 22, the state weather bureau advised fishing boats and small sea vessels not to venture out to sea, and larger sea vessels were alerted against big waves.

Due to this, he asked why MT Princess Empress was allowed to sail.

"Now that it can no longer be prevented, the oil spill caused by the sinking of MT Princess Empress will devastate our marine ecosystem," Tolentino said.

He also said there were enough laws to deal with the threat of oil spills, but the implementation has been spotty.

In the House, Negros Occidental Rep. Kiko Benitez filed a bill that will strengthen regulation of ships to prevent prevent oil spills.

House Bill 7515 provides for the strict enforcement of the regulations under the 1973 International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, and its 1978 Protocol, or MARPOL 73/78, which the country signed in 2001.

"We signed MARPOL 73/78 in 2001. An implementing legislation is long overdue. We must keep our commitment to international law, and perform our responsibility to protect the environment," Benitez said.





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# Gov't to hasten oil spill cleanup – Marcos

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

**P**RESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said on Wednesday that the government is working to finish the cleanup of the oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress in Oriental Mindoro in less than four months.

Marcos added that the volume of oil spilled in the waters of Mindoro was less compared to the 2006 oil spill in Guimaras that took four months to mop up.

"Hopefully kung hindi kaya ng one month, hopefully less kasi 'yung Guimaras oil spill apat na buwan bago ma-clean up eh (Hopefully we can finish the cleanup in less than four months because the oil spill in Guimaras

took four months to mop up)," Marcos said in a chance interview on the sidelines of an event in Quezon City.

On Aug. 11, 2006, oil tanker MT Solar 1, commissioned by Petron Corp., sank off the coast of Guimaras, spilling some 2 million liters of bunker fuel.

In comparison, the tanker responsible for the Oriental Mindoro oil spill that happened in late

February was carrying just 800,000-liters of industrialized fuel.

The spillage is currently affecting 10 municipalities in Oriental Mindoro and could possibly reach other coastal islands including Palawan, Antique and Romblon.

Marcos said he has instructed the Department of Labor and Employment and the Department of Social Welfare and Development to aid fisherfolks affected by the incident with a "cash-for-work" program.

The President said the government is closely monitoring if the oil spill will reach fishing sanctuaries and tourist areas.

"Lahat nung mga lugar, lalo na mga fishing sanctuaries, tourist areas... talagang gagawa tayo ng program ng cleanup para mak-

abalik sa trabaho ang mga nandoon (We will create a cleanup program for all areas, especially fishing sanctuaries and tourist areas, so that residents can get work)," he added.

Marcos said private corporations and even the Japan government have offered to help in the cleanup.

"Ito ay malaking bagay upang yung langis na hindi pa umaabot sa lupa ay pwede na nating harangin (This is a big help so that we can contain the oil and prevent it from reaching land)," the President said.

"Mayroon nang umabot dahil hindi natin nahanap noon kung saan ang barko (The oil has reached some coastal areas before we found the vessel)," he added.





## Mindoro fisherfolk reel from oil spill

BY JING VILLAMENTE  
AND LADY JEAN KABAGANI

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources on Wednesday said fisherfolk in the entire province of Mindoro are now feeling the impact of the oil spill from the tanker *MT Princess Empress*.

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This after the provincial government declared a "fishing ban" due to the oil spill that has affected over 11,000 families of fishermen who depend on the shore waters for their livelihood.

BFAR Information and Fisherfolk Coordination Unit Chief Nazario Briguera said that aside from the fisherfolk, the most affected are the seaweed and crustacean stationary farms.

"Fish tend to swim," Briguera said, referring to the danger to marine life. "But seaweeds and shellfish cannot move to protect themselves."

He said there should be an intervention like making a technical analysis of the sea waters and providing funds for alternative livelihoods for the fisherfolk.

"BFAR has mobilized our floating asset – the monitoring control surveillance vessel – as our intervention to check the sea waters," Briguera said.

Oriental Mindoro contributes 3.5 percent of the total food production of the entire region from the sea waters.

### Cleanup in 4 months?

Meanwhile, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. is hoping the oil spill could be cleaned up in four months or less.

"Hopefully, if it can't be done in one month, hopefully, less (than four months)," Marcos said in a chance interview in Quezon City on Wednesday.

The President is adamant that the government expedite the cleanup as the volume of the oil spilled in Mindoro was less than that in the Guimaras oil spill in 2006, where the cleanup took four months.

Briguera said it will take time to get the laboratory test results on the sea waters to determine the areas where the fishermen could fish.

"Our director (Demosthenes Escoto) has been there and he allotted P4 million for the immediate implementation of alternative livelihoods for the affected fishermen," he added.

The BFAR has also coordinated with the provincial government and suggested to Governor Bonz Dolor that he declare a "central landing" where commercial fishing vessels could check if the fish they caught are safe for consumption.

He said the BFAR believes the owners of the *MT Princess Empress* should compensate the affected fisherfolk and be held accountable for the environmental damage.

Marcos said he had instructed the Department of Labor and Employment and the Department of Social Welfare and Development to help the affected fisherfolk.

The government, he said, is closely monitoring the situation, especially the effects on fishing sanctuaries and tourist areas.

He said private corporations and the Japanese government have extended assistance and equipment to augment the cleanup. @tribunephil\_Lade





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## EDITORIAL

A member of the



The National Association of Philippine Newspapers

# Maritime disasters abound

**T**O say that maritime disasters and oil spills are isolated occurrences in the Philippines is to state a clear understatement. These catastrophes happen almost every day, what with the vast shoreline and internal waters, seas, bays, straits, rivers and lakes that comprise our geographical territory.

On an exceptionally unlucky day -- Feb. 28, 2023 -- two serious incidents happened, prompting Sen. Francis Tolentino to deliver a privilege speech in the Senate about the rampant maritime disasters in the country and how these might be remedied.

On that date, Tolentino said, roll-on roll-off vessel MV Starlite Saturn ran aground in the shallow waters of Bohol called Danajon Bank. The vessel was en route to Cebu City from a port in Surigao, and the incident caused considerable damage to the reefs.

Earlier that day, oil tanker MT Princess Empress sank off Oriental Mindoro with 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil, after it encountered engine trouble due to overheating. It then drifted towards Balingawan Point until it submerged. An oil slick later emerged, and it has now spread over 24 square kilometers.

**'While accidents do happen and with a vast archipelagic country that we have that necessitates maritime travel, the government should by now possess equipment, expertise and personnel to serve as first responders in cases of oil slicks caused by sunken cargo vessels.'**

On Feb. 27, bulk carrier MV Manfel Carrier V ran aground in Lubang Island, Occidental Mindoro. The vessel was sailing to Bauan, Batangas from Subic, Zambales when it encountered engine trouble off Fortune Island and was hit by large waves.

On Feb. 10, cargo ship LCT Pacifica 1 capsized off Surigao del Norte while traversing the waters between Hinatuan and Bucas Grande islands.

The oil spill has so far affected nine towns in Oriental Mindoro -- Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan, Gloria, Basud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay and Bulacacao, and has reached as far as Antique and Palawan.

This one incident will have far-reaching negative consequences in the livelihood of fisherfolk and farmers in Mindoro and nearby islands, with fish and other marine products contaminated, their feeding grounds and mangroves devastated and ecological recovery long and uncertain. In the province of Oriental Mindoro alone, there are 18,000 registered fishermen whose families are facing hunger because of the oil spill.

An oil spill of this magnitude, Tolentino said, was last experienced in 2006 when M/T Solar 1, carrying 2.1 million liters of bunker fuel, sank off the coast of Guimaras. The spill affected 1,500 hectares of the local ecosystem consisting of mangroves, seagrass, and coral reefs.

Under Executive Order No. 125, as amended, MARINA is mandated to undertake safety regulatory functions pertaining to vessel operations while under Republic Act No. 9993, or the Philippine Coast Guard Law of 2009, the Philippine Coast Guard is mandated to enforce all maritime laws.

The question is, Tolentino said, were LCT Pacifica 1, MV Manfel Carrier V, MV Starlite Saturn, and MT Princess Empress found to be seaworthy by the regulatory agencies? Some of these accidents are preventable, he pointed out, if only the authorities were doing their job well.

It is sad that it took the DENR a couple of days to identify where exactly the sunken vessel was, and retrieval of dirty oil and flotsam was painstakingly slow.

While accidents do happen and with a vast archipelagic country that we have that necessitates maritime travel, the government should by now possess equipment, expertise and personnel to serve as first responders in cases of oil slicks caused by sunken cargo vessels.





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# Malaya Business Insight

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## Mindoro oil spill

**T**he Philippines is truly naturally blessed beyond belief. More than our rich culture and history and our distinct character as a race, Filipinos also take pride of the many wonders of nature creatively carved and nurtured by time in nearly every corner of the archipelago. Found in the so-called Coral Triangle, the Philippines, together with Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Northern Australia, is the cradle of vibrant marine life and is the heart of marine biodiversity worldwide. Within this triangle we can find 75 percent of all coral species known to science, six out of the seven species of marine turtles, and more than 3,000 species of reef fish. Threats of destruction of these marine sanctuaries where marine biodiversity rests is a threat as well to the survival of every form of life on earth, including humans.

It is for this reason that the recent oil spill in Mindoro is truly alarming. The abundance of marine life that thrives within the coral reefs of this area is much too precious for the Philippines and the world to lose. Sadly, however, response to the incident seem to be at a pace very disproportionate to the importance of the protected area, perhaps underestimating the threats posed to the life of sea creatures and the life of the surrounding communities as well. Climate change was a threat challenging enough for the world to address. Sea accidents such as oil spills all the more multiplies the biodiversity hazards that governments will have to deal with. While the urgency of response to these types of catastrophes is a fact, the inadequacy of resources and capacity is often the more debatable point.

As with any disaster or calam-

ity, rehabilitation from oil spills is always the most exigent and most difficult phase. The impact of the oil spill

in Mindoro, or wherever an oil spill has occurred, will haunt marine and human life even several years after the oil has been cleared. I cannot help but recall the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in the tragic night of April 20, 2010. More than a decade after the accident that spewed an estimated 134 million gallons of oil for 87 days and smothered the gulf, caused \$17.2 billion in environmental damages, and left 11 oil rig crew dead, research revealed that while the waters may have cleared, the impact of oil pollution remains lurking. According to several research conducted in oil spill sites, including that of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, traces of oil can remain in seafloors for up to 40 years. We can only imagine how marine life and biodiversity in the heart of the world's center of marine biodiversity will be altered in the next four decades should efforts to address the Mindoro oil spill remain at its current pace.

The stakes in this Mindoro oil spill are extremely high, not only for the Philippines but for the rest of the world dependent on the survival of diverse marine life and habitat. The response of the Philippines to this marine catastrophe will be recorded not only on the news but in history, and this response will be the measure by which the world will see the depth of our commitment to preserving our own posterity and the future of humanity.



### 'TOL VIEWS

SENATOR

FRANCIS N. TOLENTINO





**Editorial**

## Sinira ang kabuhayan pati na ang kalikasan

**SINIRA** nang natapong langis ang pinagkukunan ng Sikinabubuhay ng mga taga-Pola, Oriental Mindoro. Wala silang mapangisdaan ngayon sapagkat nakahalo sa tubig ang langis na tumagas sa *MT Princess Empress*. Ipinag-utos ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) na huwag munang papalaot ang mga mangingisda sapagkat kontaminado ang dagat sa baybayin ng Pola. Babala rin ng Department of Health (DOH) sa mga residenteng nasa baybay-dagat na magsuot ng face mask upang hindi malanghap ang masangsang na amoy nang natapong krudo. Pinalilipat din ng tirahan ang mga buntis at may mga sakit sa baga upang hindi makalanghap ng natapong langis.

Bakas sa mukha ng mga residente ng Pola ang hinagpis sapagkat hindi nila alam kung saan kukuha ng kakainin. Tanong nila: Hanggang kailan sila magtitiis sa perwisyong dinulot ng *MT Princess Empress*?

Habang naghihinagpis, nagtulong-tulong pa rin ang mga residente ng Pola na salukin ang mga natapong



langis na halos ay matakpan na ang dalampasigan. Sabi ni Pola Mayor Jennifer Mindanao Cruz, apektado rin ng oil spill ang kanilang turismo. At ang ikinadidismaya ni Mayor Cruz, wala umanong ipinadadalang tulong ang may-ari nang lumubog na *MT Princess Empress* sa kanila. Ayon pa sa mayor, hindi biro ang tumapong langis sa karagatan at ang kanyang bayan ang masyadong napuruhan.

Lumubog ang *MT Princess Empress* noong Pebrero 28 sa baybayin ng Naujan, Oriental Mindoro habang patungo sa Iloilo. Galing Bataan ang tanker at may kargang 800,000 ng litro ng industrial fuel oil. Malaki umano ang alon sa baybayin ng Naujan dahilan para lumubog ang tanker. Nailigtas ang mga crew ng tanker.

Bukod sa Naujan at Pola, kumalat na rin ang langis sa mga bayan ng Pinamalayan at Gloria sa Oriental Mindoro. Sa report ng Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), umabot na rin umano sa Marinduque, Palawan at Antique ang oil spill.

Sinabi naman ng Department of Transportation (DOTr) na hihingi sila ng tulong sa Japanese government upang mapigilan ang pagkalat pa ng oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro at iba pang probinsiya. Nararapat din namang obligahin ng DOTr ang owner ng *MT Princess Empress* na tumulong sa mga naapektuhan ng oil spill. Kumilos sila at huwag takasan ang responsibilidad. Hindi biro ang nilikhang perwisyo sa kabuhayan at kapaligiran nang tumagas na langis mula sa tanker. Malaki ang pananatagan ng may-ari sapagkat hindi dapat ibiniyabe ang tanker na may masamang kondisyon. Dapat siniguro nilang ligtas ito bago pumalaot.





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## Clean-up sa oil spill sa Mindoro bibilisan

UMAASA si Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na hindi tataagal ng apat na buwan ang clean-up initiative sa oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro.

Nangako ang Pangulo na bibilisan ng pamahalaan ang clean-up drive sabay sabing ang dami ng oil spill sa katubigan ng Mindoro ay mas mababa kumpara sa 2006 oil spill sa Guimaras kung saan ang paglilinis ay umabot ng apat na buwan.

"Hopefully, kung hindi kaya ng one month (ang clean-up) hopefully less (than four months), kasi ang Guimaras na oil spill apat na buwan bago na clean up," ayon sa Pangulo sa isang chance interview sa Quezon City.

"Siguro naman this time, kasi mas bawas nang konti ang oil spill ay mas mabibilisan natin, kahit na hindi ismag buwan, hindi naman siguro natin paabutin ng apat na buwan," dagdag na pahayag nito.

Inatasan naman ni Pangulong Marcos ang Department of Labor and Employment at Department of Social Welfare and Development para tulungan ang mga apektadong mangingisda ng "cash-for-work" program para maka-agapay ang mga ito sa epekto ng oil spill.

"Yung mga mangingisda hindi makapangisda ngayon, bawal mangisda kay't wala silang hanapbuhay, pinalitan natin ng cash-for-work program dahil sila ngayon ang maglilinis at binabantayan natin ng husto lahat," ayon sa Pangulo.

Sinabi pa ng Pangulo na masusing mino-monitor ng gobyerno ang situasyon partikular na ang fishing sanctuaries at tourist areas kung ang oil spill ay umabot dito.

Samantala, nag-alok naman ng tulong at kagamitan ang mga pribadong korporasyon at Japan government para sa clean-up drive.

KRIS JOSE





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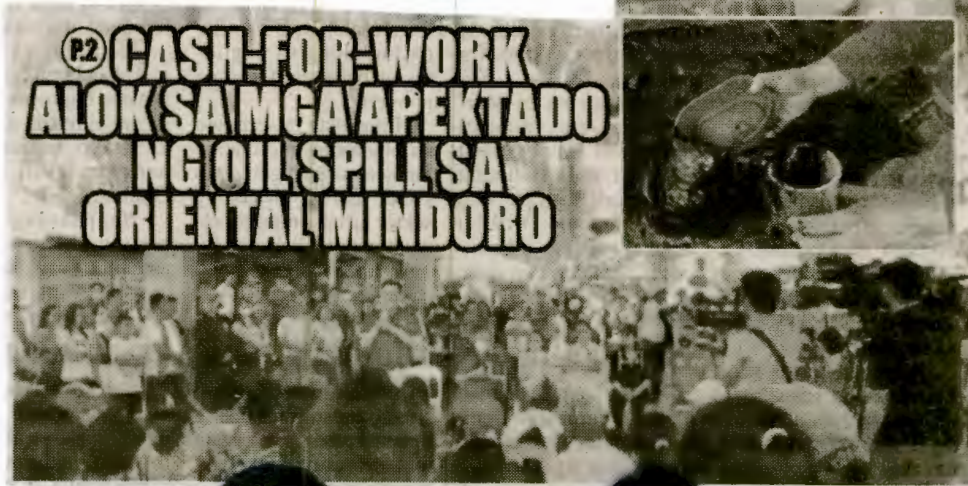
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**P.2 CASH-FOR-WORK  
ALOK SA MGA APEKTADO  
NG OIL SPILL SA  
ORIENTAL MINDORO**

**Cash-for-work alok sa mga apektado ng oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro**

Nasa 15,000 na mga mangingisda ang apektado ng oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro ang inalok ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ng "cash for work".

Inatasan na ni Marcos ang Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) at Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) tungkol sa gagawing paglilinis sa oil spill na sanhi ng lumubog na MT Empress Princess.

Sinabi ng Pangulo na dahil bawal pang mangisda ang mga naapektuhan at nawalan ng hanapbuhay kaya inalok ang mga ito na tumulong sa paglilinis at babayaran sila ng gobyerno.

Idinagdag ng Pangulo na binabantayang mabuti hindi lamang ng gobyerno kundi pati ng pribadong sektor na may mga equipment para malinis ang langis sa karagatan at hindi na umabot sa lupa.

Kinumpirma rin ni

Marcos na may langis na ring nakaabot sa lupa dahil hindi kaagad nahanap ang eksaktong lugar kung saan lumubog ang barko.

Idinagdag ni Marcos na baka abutin ng apat na buwan bago makabalik sa pangangisda ang mga apektado katulad nang nangyaring oil spill sa Guimaras.

Nagpahayag din ng pag-asa si Marcos na hindi aabutin ng apat na buwan ang gagawing paglilinis.

- Malou Escudero -





## **PBBM nag-alok ng 'cash for work' sa mga mangingisdang apektado ng oil spill**

**INALOK** ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., ang 15,000 mangingisda na apektado ng oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro.

Ayon sa Pangulong Marcos, inatasan na niya ang Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) at Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) na magsagawa ng clean up drive sa lugar.

"Ang aking instruction sa, together DOLE, DSWD, pag yung clean up, kasi yung mga mangingisda hindi makapangisda ngayon, bawal mangisda kaya't wala silang hanapuhay, pinalitan natin ng cash for work program dahil sila ngayon ang

maglilinis at binabantayan namin ng husto," pahayag ng Pangulo.

Una rito, sinabi ng Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) na maaring abutin ng isang buwan ang paglilinis sa 800,000 litro na karga ng lumubog na oil tanker.

Umaasa ang Pangulo na hindi sana matagal ang paglilinis para makabalik na sa pangangisda ang mga apektadong residente at hindi matulad sa Guimaras oil spill na inabot ng apat na buwan ang paglilinis.

Ibinahagi rin niya na tumutulong na ang mga pribadong korporasyon pati na ang Japan sa paglilinis sa oil spill.

(Vanz Fernandez)





## CASH-FOR-WORK SA MGA APEKTADO NG OIL SPILL SA ORIENTAL MINDORO

INATASAN ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. ang mga ahensya ng gobyerno na magsagawa ng cleanup operation kaugnay ng oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro at kanyang tiniyak sa mga apektadong komunidad na magbibigay ng tulong ang gobyerno sa pamamagitan ng cash-for-work program.

Ang Department of Labor and Employment at ang Department of Social Welfare and Development ang inatasan ni Marcos na magsagawa ng clean up drive sa lugar.

*"Ang aking instruction sa — well together, DOLE, DSWD, 'yung cleanup. Kasi 'yung mga mangingisda hindi makapangisda ngayon, bawal mangisda. At kaya't wala silang hanap-buhay, pinalitan natin ng cash-for-work program dahil sila ngayon ang maglilinis,"* tugon ni Marcos sa panayam sa sidelines ng paglulunsad ng Kadiwa ng Pangulo sa Quezon City.

Ibinahagi rin ng Pangulo na tumutulong na ang mga pribadong korporasyon maging ang Japan sa paglilinis sa oil spill.

*"At binabantayan namin nang husto, lahat naman and — lahat ng — pati, hindi lamang pamahalaan kung 'di pati na ang mga private corporations na mayroong equipment, pati*

*na ang Japan na nagpa-dala ng tulong at ito'y malaking bagay upang 'yung hindi pa naka — 'yung langis na hindi pa umaabot sa lupa ay puwede na nating harangin,"* punto ng Pangulo.

Ang maganda rin aniya ay natunton na ng mga awtoridad ang lumubog na tanker kung saan nanggaling ang tumatagas na langis kaya batid na ang direksyon ng oil spill.

Samantala, binabantayan din ng gobyerno ang mga fishing sanctuaries at tourist areas. Agad silang magsagawa ng cleanup drive kung may nakita silang langis sa baybayin.

*"Yun ay talagang babantayan natin at kung mangyari na abutan talaga doon — pumunta sa lupa 'yung — sa shoreline ang langis ay talagang maglalagay — gagawa tayo ng programa ng pag-cleanup para makabalik sa trabaho lahat ng tiga-roon,"* saad ni Marcos.

*"But in the meantime, habang wala pa ay sila ay — they are engaged in the cash-for-work program sa cleanup. 'Pag natapos na 'yun, puwede na silang mangisda ulit, puwede silang bumalik sa trabaho nila,"* hirit ng Punong Ehekutibo.

(Mylene Alfonso)





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## NEWS BRIEFS

### Iloilo City kabado sa pagkalat ng langis mula Oriental Mindoro

KABADO ang mga lokal na opisyal sa Iloilo City sa posibilidad ng pagkalat ng tumagas na langis sa kanilang karagatan mula sa Oriental Mindoro.

Ayon kay City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (CDRRMO) head Donna Magno, nakikipag-unayan na sila sa Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) para i-monitor

ang direksyon ng galaw ng tubig matapos na maapektuhan na rin ng oil spill ang ilang baybayin sa bayan ng Caluya sa Antique.

Bumuo na rin aniya sila ng technical working group (TWG) para maglunsad ng pre-disaster risk assessment para sa karagatan ng Iloilo City.

Binubuo ito ng mga professor mula sa Uni-

versity of the Philippines (UP), marine biologists, chemists at mga kinatawan ng CDRRMO at City Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) na siyang makikipag-ugnayan sa mga ahensya ng gobyerno tulad ng Office of the Civil Defense.

Ito ay bilang paghahanda aniya sa ilalatag nilang aksyon sakaling kumalat ang langis sa kanilang karagatan mula sa lumubog na MV Princess Empress na may kargang 800,000 litro ng industrial oil.





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# PEOPLES JOURNALS

Everybody's Newspaper

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**GROUND ZERO.** Volunteers dressed in personal protective equipment clean up the oil spill on the shore of Pola in Oriental Mindoro caused by the sunken fuel tanker MT Princess Empress. Pola town is among the municipalities hardest hit by the oil spill. It has been under a state of calamity since Friday. Photo courtesy of Center for Energy, Ecology and Development





## Caluya nasa 'state of calamity' dahil sa oil spill

Ni ZAIDA  
DELOS REYES

ISINAILALIM na sa "state of calamity" ang munisipalidad ng Caluya sa Antique dahil sa labis na pinsalang dulot ng oil spill sa katubigang sakop ng baybayin ng tatlong barangay.

Sa ilalim ng Resolution 31, Series of 2023 na ipinasa ng Sangguniang Bayan ng Caluya sa special session nitong Lunes, sinabing ang oil spill ay kumalat na sa baybayin ng Sitio Sabang sa Barangay Tinognoc, Toong, Banja Proper at Sitio Balinao sa Barangay Semirara, at Sitio Liwagao sa Barangay Sibolo.

"The oil spill can lead to possible widespread environmental and health hazards all throughout the islands of the municipality,

which is detrimental to public health and economic well-being of the residents, most especially the fisherfolks, shell collectors, and seaweed farmers composing the majority and the marginalized sectors of our society," saad ng resolusyon.

Ayon pa sa resolusyon, ang kabuhayan ng mga residente sa lugar partikular na ang mga nakatira sa mga barangay ng Alegrisa, Sibato, at Imba ay umaasa lamang sa katubigan na apektado ng oil spill.

Kaugnay nito, nanawagan ang munisipalidad ng tulong sa national government at iba pang ahensiya ng gobyerno na tulungan silang mapigilan ang pagkalat ng kontaminasyong dulot ng oil spill.

"The municipality calls for immediate response and intervention from the national government agencies, technical experts, and stakeholders in providing the necessary intervention to prevent the widespread contamination in other islands of the municipality," dagdag pa ng resolusyon.

Ayon kay Department of Social Welfare and Development Disaster Response Management Division head Judith T. Barredo, karamihan sa mga apektado ay pawang mga mangingisda na nakakaamoy ng oil spill.

Batay sa pinakahuling tala ng Coast Guard District Western Visayas (CGDWV), umaabot sa 6,298 pamilya o 22,020 indibidwal na ang apektado ng insidente.





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**NEW NATURE CENTER** Ambassador Michèle Boccoz of France (third from left) and Environment Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga (third from right) led the groundbreaking of the Shark Fin Bay Environmental Research Center in Pangatalan Island, Palawan on March 2. The French Facility for Global Environment granted funding of €527,000 to the privately-run Sulubai Filipino-French nongovernment organization to strengthen the region's resilience, and engage local communities on the management of the protected areas. The center will serve as a venue of scientific innovations and research to enhance the conservation and protection of the island's coastal and natural resources, said the Embassy of France.





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## A way to move forward in Masungi

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otherwise known as the "Extended National Integrated Protected Areas System (E-Nipás) Law," which amends RA 7586, the original Nipás Act, clearly laid out the main premise of the national policy of the state in relation to protected areas.

It has to be within the ambit of a multi-stakeholder policy platform. RA 11038 could not be any clearer when it stated "... that effective administration of these areas is possible only through cooperation among the national government, local governments, concerned nongovernment organizations, private organizations and local communities. ..."

And yet, when one looks at the current situation in Masungi in the province of Rizal, it seems that the landscape is no longer of cooperation but of conflict. Ideally, it should be the government, through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), that should serve as an umpire or mediator among competing interests. As it is now turning out, the DENR has become a party to the conflict.

The DENR technically has the legal mandate to determine a solution to the problem. Ideally, the Protected Areas Management Board (PAMB) should have been the platform in which a solution would be crafted in the context of multilateralism and stakeholder participation. But PAMBs have now effectively become a venue that could easily be influenced by politics, and not by reason and science.

There is already an approved resolution by the PAMB of the Upper Marikina River Basin Protected Landscape (UMRBPL) recommending the termination of the 2017 memorandum of agreement (MoA) between the DENR and the Masungi Georeserve Foundation Inc. (MGFI). The DENR, on its own, can implement the recommendation. But it will be far from solving the problem.

First of all, such a move could easily trigger a protracted legal battle, considering that many of the issues raised against the MoA, ranging from the constitutionality of its provisions, to the alleged violations of the terms of the agreement, are justiciable issues for which only the courts can render final judgment. What makes the position of the DENR untenable is that it would be assailing a MoA which it signed in good faith. If the argument is that former Environment secretary Gina Lopez signed the MoA sans complete staff work, and was considered a midnight deal, it would amount to a self-inflicted wound, and would even look as if the DENR was throwing its own former secretary, who incidentally has passed away and cannot defend herself, under the bus.

Second, if the core argument is that the MGFI violated the terms of the contract, then the DENR would be opening itself fatally to being held accountable for its own failure to create an oversight committee and appoint its own project manager, as stipulated in the MoA, for six years since its signing. It cannot even claim that its failure was deliberate since creating the committee and appointing a manager would have legitimized what for them was an onerous MoA. This will beg the question of tolerating for six years what it considered to be legally infirm.

Meanwhile, the MGFI has performed its part of the agreement, effectively managing an ecotourism endeavor, and reforesting and protecting over 2,000 hectares, enough for it to gain awards from international organizations.

The DENR is also raising the issue of the refusal of MGFI to convert its MoA into a Special Agreement in Protected Areas (SAPA), something which was made available to special users within protected areas by virtue of RA 11038, like the resort owners, to legitimize their operations. A side argument is raised defending the legitimacy of users within the portion of the protected area covered by Presidential Decree 324, when then President Ferdinand E. Marcos declared 1,729 hectares of the Marikina Watershed as alienable and disposable in 1973, and therefore available for exploitation and development. This is premised on the argument that Presidential Proclamation 1636 which reinstated the protected nature of the area was an executive action that was not equivalent to a presidential decree where Marcos exercised legislative functions, and can therefore not rescind PD 324.

This latter argument is an attempt to shield those who held legal rights prior to the passage of RA 7586. It is however legally tenuous, and would require judicial determination, as it would touch on the nature and limits of Marcos' martial powers. It would also not protect the resource users whose activities that are otherwise contrary to law began only after 1997 when RA 7586 was issued. It is therefore valid that these users must apply for a SAPA.

But that cannot be said for MGFI, simply because it had an existing valid MoA that technically cannot be disturbed by any recent administrative policies like SAPA.

But what could be most damaging to the DENR is the enormous blowback it will suffer from public opinion, where it will be seen as terminating an agreement with a known and multi-awarded environmental protector like MGFI, even as it now opens up the land for use by commercial resort owners. And should an incident of illegal logging occur within the protected area, it would definitely further erode the credibility of the agency not only locally but likely even internationally.

There is however another option which the government should undertake, which is for all the parties to submit to a third-party initiated mediation or dispute resolution process, that could facilitate the operationalization of a multi-stakeholder solution to the conflict.

Beyond Masungi, it is about time we institutionalize diplomatic resolutions to environmental conflicts, where extrajudicial negotiations are nurtured and advanced. It is heartening to know that the School of Environmental Science and Management at UP Los Baños has proposed a doctoral program in this area, and such proposal is in the pipeline for final approval at the university. One of the main goals of the program is to produce graduates who can perform effectively as part of a cadre of competent professionals, practitioners and environmental leaders who can lend scholarly expertise in resolving contemporary challenges in environmental conflict, such as the one we face in areas like Masungi.





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## NEWS BRIEFS

### Ormoc 'megacity' seen

ORMOC CITY – Premium Megastructures Inc., the real-estate-arm of Makati-based Premium Capital Holdings, Inc., is set to build a “megacity township” here.

Premium Megastructures Inc. president Francis Lloyd Chua, along with Leyte Fourth District Representative Richard Gomez and Ormoc City Mayor Lucy Torres-Gomez, led the kick-off of the 20-year development project dubbed as the Ormoc City Megacity Township on Monday at the Barangay Naungan Mangrove Eco-Park here.

The project plans to develop an approximately 150 hectares of prime coastal property spanning three barangays – Naungan, Lao and San Juan – into a thriving smart business center featuring residential, commercial, industrial and institutional spaces.

It will be constructed right beside the Mangrove Eco-Park, a 200-hectare mangrove-protected area. **ELMER RECUERDO**





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# PEOPLES Tonight



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# 2 NEGROS OCC. CITIES BRING HONOR TO PH

By CRISTINA  
LEE-PISCO

## *Sagay, Bago Cities cited for sustainable tourism practices at Berlin convention*

TWO Negros Occidental cities brought honor to the Philippines at the Internationale in Messe Berlin, Germany on March 7 to 9 2023, the Department of Tourism

**Tourismus-Börse (ITB) 2023 Convention (DOT) announced on Wednesday. /Page 10**

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Recognized for their inspirational sustainable tourism practices and efforts, Sagay City bagged the People's Choice Award and ranked 2nd under Nature and Scenery Category with its entry, "Mangrove Forest Protection through Community-based EcoTourism Project". The city's Suyac Island Mangrove Ecopark, located inside the Sagay Marine Reserve, is the first fully community-based ecotourism site in Sagay, that offers an unparalleled experience and allows travelers to connect with nature and local culture.

Another pride of Negros Occidental, Bago City's entry "Reviving the Majestic Diversity of Bago Watershed" was awarded 3rd among the finalists under Environment and Climate Category. Bago City's Watershed plays a vital role in steering the wheel of the economy of Negros Occidental by supplying water to about 19,000 hectares of agricultural areas. To protect, conserve and rehabilitate the watershed, the city government mobilized its resources and strengthened community involvement through Integrated Ecosystem Management Approach (Ridge to Reef Environmental Management).

The prestigious Green Destinations Story Awards at the ITB Berlin showcases the most inspirational initiatives for sustainable tourism development from stories submitted to the yearly Green Destinations Top 100 Stories competition.

With the long-term goal of securing increased arrivals, receipts, and investments for the country, TPB annually participates in the ITB Berlin, which provides the Philippine travel trade an opportunity to network with relevant decision-makers from new and existing tourism markets across Europe, America, and Asia.

DOT Secretary Christi-

na Garcia Frasco led the combined group of 26 co-exhibitors from the public and private sector consisting of 40 delegates attending the event.

TPB Chief Operating Officer Margarita Nograles and other DOT officials also joined the secretary. The Philippines is expected to highlight the country's tourism developments and product offerings to over 160,000 visitors expected to attend the world's largest travel and tourism trade fair.

The Philippines' participation at the ITB Berlin aims to strengthen the country's global tourism campaign through partnership opportunities with various tourism private sectors including tour operators, online travel agencies, new online distribution platforms, travel websites and communities, journalists, and influencers, among others.

"The ITB Berlin holds great opportunities for the Philippines to showcase to the world its award-winning destinations such as Boracay, Cebu, Siargao, and Palawan, and also to include Banaue, Intramuros, and South Cotabato, among others. We also look forward to giving the world a view into our distinct and diverse culture, as well as the country's best asset: the warmth and hospitality of the Filipino people," Frasco said.

"Our participation is pursuant to further positioning the Philippines as a tourism powerhouse in Asia, and hopefully the world in the years ahead," she added, citing also that the ITB attendance will help fast-track the recovery efforts by the DOT of the pandemic-hit industry.

The Philippines booth at the ITB Berlin featured the country's rich culture and sustainable tourism through the artistic works of T'nalak weaver Myrna Pula of South Cotabato and Yakan Weaver and Entrepreneur Angelita Pichay Iul of Zamboanga. Moreover, visitors got a taste of Philippine coffee and choc-

olates through Kape de Filipina, a brand offering products meticulously grown by farmers and communities in the Philippines.

A cocktail reception for international buyers, Philippine sellers and industry partners was hosted by the DOT and TPB on the second day of the convention where they were treated with traditional Filipino cuisine by Ayan, a Filipino street food restaurant based in Berlin and live performances from Lapu Lapu Arnis de Abanico, Songwriter and Singer David Mercado and Princess Virtudazo.

"What we have showcased in this year's ITB is just a glimpse of our country's rich culture and wide range of tourism offerings, curated to bring more ideas and inspiration to promote the Philippines as a meaningful and purposeful destination. We are more than ready to welcome you to our home. Come visit to witness, firsthand, the Philippine Experience," said Nograles.

This year, more tourism stakeholders joined the Philippine delegation to reintroduce the country as a world-class tourism destination such as Airtrav Philippines, Araw Hospitality Inc., Amorita Resort, Annsset Holidays, Inc., Baron Travel Corporation, Blue Horizons Travel & Tours Inc., Bohol Beach Club, Chroma Hospitality Inc. (Crimson Hotels & Resorts), Club Agutaya Inc., CTPH lifestyle & Travel Services, Divaishnavi International Inc., El Nido Resorts, Evasion Tropicale Travel and Tours, GI Philippines Corp., Intas Destination Management Inc., Marsman Drysdale Travel Inc., MyTRIPS Travel and Tours, Plantation Bay Resort and Spa, Rajah Tour Philippines, Sharp Travel Service, Sarah Lea Travel and Tours, The Funny Lion, Total Exhibit & Expo Solutions, Inc., Travelexperts, Inc., Travelite Travel and Tours Co., and the Philippine Retirement Authority.





## Land reclamation and quarrying: Group lists 'threats' to Manila Bay's existence

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

[@jonmayuga](#)

**M**ANILA Bay continues to support life and livelihoods, experts and leaders of civil society organizations asserted, as they pressed the government to stop all land reclamation and seabed quarrying projects that threaten marine resources in the region on Tuesday.

"There is no truth to the claim that Manila Bay is dead. Manila Bay is a life-sustaining ecosystem for many fishes, mangroves, and birds. Every day, millions of artisanal fisherfolk and coastal communities in Metro Manila and nearby provinces continue to derive livelihood and sustenance from the bay," Oceana Vice President, Atty. Gloria Estenzo Ramos told the media during an online news conference on February 7.

"What threatens Manila Bay and all life it supports are the massive, destructive dump-and-fill activities which are causing irreversible damage to our marine and coastal ecosystems. Land reclamation is destroying the rich biodiversity of marine and coastal ecosystems in Manila Bay. These also endanger Metro Manila residents near Manila Bay's coast as the projects add to the worsening hazards, such as flooding, storm surges, land subsidence, and liquefaction," she added.

As of February 28, 2023, the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) listed a total of 52 reclamation projects in the country, including a similar project in Coron that has been forfeited by the government. Of this number, 22 projects are located in Manila Bay, and half

of these or 11 are already under way.

Outside of Manila Bay, the PRA lists a total of 30 projects—14 were approved plus Coron and 15 applications under Executive Order 74 with memoranda of understanding.

Manila Bay has been identified as a Key Biodiversity Area. It is a rich sardine spawning ground as shown by data from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources-National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (BFAR-NFRDI). It is also a stopover for millions of migratory birds from the northern hemisphere.

In addition, Oceana reminded the local governments of their clear mandates to protect the municipal waters and the constitutional right to a healthy, safe, resilient environment of its constituents and ensure that mechanisms and safeguards for the protection of the environment are complied with as mandated by Memorandum Circular 2022-018 issued by the Department of the Interior and Local Government.

"Instead of land reclamation, the government should be working on its rehabilitation as so directed by the Supreme Court in the landmark 2008 ruling, Metropolitan Manila Development Authority vs Concerned Residents of Manila Bay. By restoring its health and abundance, Manila Bay will in turn provide food and livelihood for so many Filipino families as it has done so for several generations. There are also mangroves there, which have the potential to provide climate resiliency to the coastal areas. Let us not waste this precious resource, it is worth so much more than the false promises of development," Ramos said.





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## Malabon, Navotas reclamation itigil

NAG-RALLY ang mga residente ng 21 barangay sa Malabon City para tutulan ang ginagawang pagtatambak sa karagatan ng Manila Bay kahapon ng umaga.

Pinangunahan ito ng Samahang Pwersa (Peoples and Reform for Social Advancement) ni Ka Job Valenzuela ng Barangay Acacia sa lungsod.

Mahigpit na inaalmahan ng grupo ang pagtatambak sa karagatan ng Manila Bay dahil possible itong ikalubog ng 21 barangay sa Malabon, Navotas at mga

karatig na siyudad na tatamaan ng reklamasyon.

Ilang parte na rin umano sa bahagi ng Navotas ang natambakan na habang nasa tapat na halos ng Dampalit at Hulong Duhat ang dulo nito.

Wala na umanong madaluyan ang tubig mula sa kabundukan at bahagi ng Quezon City patungo ng Manila Bay dahil sa reklamasyon.

Umapela rin ang mga nagprotesta na pigilan ang pagtatambak ng umano'y mga negosyanteng nasa likod ng reclamation dahil

ang yamang dagat na ipinamana ng kanilang mga ninuno ay ipapamana pa sa sunod na henerasyon kaya hindi ito dapat wasakin.

Samantala, nangako si Malabon City Mayor Jeannie Sandoval na makikipag-dalayogo ito sa grupo ng mga nag-rally para alamin ang kanilang suliranin at makagawa ng mga hakbang para sila ay matulungan.

"Narinig natin sila. Ramdam natin ang pagpapahayag nila ng kanilang damdamin sa isyu na ito," pahayag ni Mayor Sandoval.





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# MALABON, NAVOTAS RECLAMATION ITIGIL

NAG-RALLY ang mga residente ng 21 barangay sa Malabon sa Hulong Duhat, Plaza Malabon



Ang protesta na pinangunahan ng Samahang "Pwersa (Peoples and Reform for Social Advancement) ni Ka Job Valenzuela ng Acacia Malabon.

Miyerkules ng umaga. ■ /Page 10

## MALABON

Ang protesta ay pinangunahan ng Samahang "Pwersa (Peoples and Reform for Social Advancement) ni Ka Job Valenzuela ng Acacia Malabon.

Kanilang tinututulan ang pagtambak sa karagatan ng Manila Bay dahil kapag nagkataon ay lulubog ang 21 barangay sa Malabon, Navotas at karatig na syudad na tatamaan ng reclamation.

Ilang parte narin umano sa bahagi ng Navotas ang natambakan na habang nasa tapat na halos ng Dampalit at Hulong Duhat ang dulo nito.

Wala na umanong madaluyan ang tubig mula sa kapundukan at bahagi ng Quezon City patungo ng Manila Bay dahil sa tinatambakang reklamasyon.

Umapela rin ang mga nagprotesta na pigilan ang pagtambak ng umano'y mga negosyanteng nasa likod ng reclamation dahil ang yamang dagat na ipinamana ng kanilang mga ninuno ay ipapamana pa sa sunod na henerasyon kaya hindi umano dapat wasakin.

Samantala, nangako si Malabon City Mayor Jean-

nie Sandoval na makikipagdalayogo ito sa grupo ng mga nag-rally upang alamin ang kanilang suliranin at makagawa ng mga hakbang para sila ay matulungan.

"Narinig natin sila. Ramdam natin ang pagpapahayag nila ng kanilang damdamin sa isyu na ito", pahayag ni Mayor Sandoval.





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PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF DENR

THE Philippine Coast Guard and other environmental warriors collected a total of 190 sacks and 8-tonnage bags of trash during a coastal cleanup on the shores of Sitio Sabang, Barangay Tinogboc, Caluya, Antique, as of 12:45 p.m. yesterday, 8 March. The activity was temporarily halted because of the high tide.





## COA lauds Balanga WD on wastewater treatment

BY PETER TABINGO

THE Commission on Audit has commended the Balanga Water District for its contribution to the proper disposal of wastewater and decontamination and rehabilitation of the country's water bodies, particularly the Manila Bay.

In a 2022 audit released last February 23, state auditors reported that the agency had already developed and implemented a Septage Management Program (SMP).

This was a turnaround from 2020 when the COA issued a warning to Balanga water district officials that they could face possible criminal charges for failing to comply with the 2008 mandamus of the Supreme Court and RA 9275 or the Clean Water Act of 2004 requiring it to put up a wastewater treatment system to prevent dumping of raw sewage into rivers and Manila Bay.

This was bolstered by Balanga City Ordinance No. 13 and Bataan Provincial Ordinance No. 1 requiring water utilities and related government agencies to establish a proper septage management system.

The Balanga WD entered into a memorandum of agreement with EnviroKonsult Equipment and Services Inc., an independent service provider, to provide desludging services to concessionaires and to assist it in implementing the SMP.

Balanga WD management also asked the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA) to review and evaluate its proposed tariff rates for septage fees to be charged from concessionaires.

"The creation and implementation of the District's SMP contributed to the prevention of wastewater being discharged by the different households and commercial establishments near the coastal waters to leak and flow to our river systems," the COA said.





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DOT, TIEZA TO STUDY CITY'S ACTION

# BAGUIO'S TITLING OF BURNHAM PARK RAISES LEGAL ISSUES

By Vincent Cabreza  
@InqNational

BAGUIO CITY—The local government has successfully titled portions of Burnham Park to preserve its man-made lake, the Baguio Orchidarium, the Melvin Jones Grandstand, and its football field, which fall within the alienable public domain, an official said on Monday.

Eugene Buyuccan, chief of the General Services Office (GSO), said the city government became the owner of 182,040 square meters (18.2 hectares) of the century-old park following the issuance of the Original Certificate of Title (OCT) No. 2023000017 by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources on March 3. He made the disclosure to the city council on Monday.

### PH 1st land title

The portions in the new title were not part of OCT No. 1, which covers the rest of Burnham Park, one of the most popular tourist spots in the summer capital, including the Athletic Bowl and its surrounding woodlands. OCT No. 1 in Baguio, which was issued in 1910, is the country's first land title.

Baguio began the process of titling all city-owned or administered, public properties within the townsite reservation since 2017, including parts of Burnham Park to prevent private individuals or groups from acquiring them through the American colonial era's townsite sales process that is still operating today or through land patenting laws,

Buyuccan said.

He said the new Burnham Park title does not mean the city government would change its status and use as prescribed by Proclamation No. 64, which reserved the 32-ha area "for park purposes" in 1925.

The park reservation was separated almost a decade after Baguio was declared a chartered city by the American colonial government in 1909.

### Concerns

But the city council advised the GSO to inform the Department of Tourism (DOT) about its decision to title Burnham Park because of concerns raised by Councilors Elmer Datuin and Mylene Yaranon about its legality.

The DOT and the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority, or Tieza (formerly the Philippine Tourism Authority, which had direct control over Burnham Park in 1981), would need to study the city's actions, said DOT Cordillera director Jovita Ganongan.

When then President Fidel V. Ramos turned over the management of the park to Baguio through Executive Order No. 224 in 1995, his directive stipulated that the city government could not "encumber, mortgage, or alienate any portion of the park," Ganongan told the Inquirer.

The council had been deliberating on the park's titling since Feb. 27, when Datuin pointed out that the city's action might have breached an understanding with DOT officials that Baguio was merely its custodian. INQ





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## House approves rightsizing bill on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading

THE HOUSE of Representatives on Wednesday approved on second reading a bill seeking to rightsize the bureaucracy to improve the delivery of government services.

Lawmakers voted by voice to pass House Bill No. 7240 or the National Government Rightsizing Act, one of the House's priority bills.

"The government shall... minimize, if not eliminate redundancies, overlaps and duplications in its operations and simplify its rules and regulations, and systems and processes, while protecting the welfare of civil servants and other government workers," the bill stated.

The bill grants the President of the Philippines the authority to rightsize the different agencies of the Executive branch.

Under the bill, the President can scale down or eliminate functions, programs and projects "that could be better carried out or undertaken by the private sector or have already been devolved to LGUs (local government units)." The President can also transfer or integrate functions from one agency to another.

A Committee on Rightsizing the Executive Branch (CREB) will be created to review and study the roles, functions and manpower of different agencies under the Executive branch. The Executive Secretary will be the chairman of the committee, with the Budget Secretary as vice-chairperson.

The bill also detailed the retirement benefits and separation incentives for government employees affected by the rightsizing program.

For instance, a government employee who has worked in government for five to 11 years will get one-half of the actual monthly basic salary for every year of service. Those who have 31 years of service and above can get one and one-fourth of their actual monthly basic salary for every year of service.

A minimum of five years of government service is required before an affected worker can avail of the separation benefits.

If enacted into law, the rightsizing program should be implemented over a three-year period.

The program will cover all agencies under the Executive branch, namely departments, bureaus, offices, commissions, boards, councils, government-owned and -controlled corpora-

tions, and their attached agencies. LGUs may also rightsize their offices based on their financial capacity.

Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman previously said that trimming the government workforce by 5% would save P14.8 billion in funds.

Although President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. has not certified the bill as urgent, he has expressed support for the program.

During his State of the Nation Address last year, he described rightsizing as "a reform mechanism that seeks to enhance the government's institutional capacity to perform its mandate and provide better services, while ensuring optimal and efficient use of resources." — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**